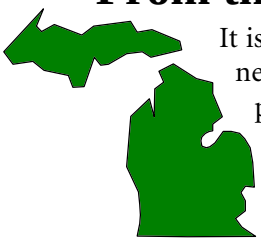
Michigan Child Care Matters

DEPARTMENT OF CONSUMER & INDUSTRY SERVICES
Bureau of Regulatory Services
Division of Child Day Care Licensing

EXCEPTIONAL PRACTICE:
THEORY AND PROGRAM

Issue 55 Winter, 2001

From the Division Director



It is hard to imagine that this is my last newsletter article. After 35 years in public service, the last 19 years as the Director of Child Day Care Licensing, I plan to retire in January 2001.

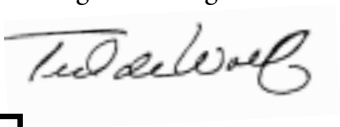
Early on, I thought that it was important to communicate issues that concerned this department and would be of interest to the child care provider community. My initial concern was with family homes as the amount of face-to-face contact was more limited than with group day care homes and child care centers. Because of the limited department contact, I thought it important we maintain some level of ongoing positive communication. As a result, we created this newsletter. Many of you have helped along the way to make it a success by writing articles and sharing your points of view and experiences.

Michigan Child Care Matters reaches all licensed child care providers and others interested in quality child care. During the last 19 years, Michigan's child care programs have grown from approximately 13,000 to 22,000 licensed providers. Consequently, the circulation of our publication has nearly doubled since the inaugural issue in Winter, 1983.

I have received numerous comments on how much providers have enjoyed the newsletter's content. Many of you, I have been told, share particular articles with your parents or even post them on your refrigerator or bulletin board.

Caring for someone else's children is an awesome responsibility. I encourage all of you to maintain a high level of commitment to the safety, care and development of young children. I have spoken before of how brain research has, from a scientific standpoint, only reinforced what early childhood educators have known for years, that early stimulation of very young children can make a marked difference in a child's future performance.

I leave this position with some sadness because I have made so many friends professionally and personally. Over the years I have had the opportunity to meet many of you personally. I have gained many insights from you as providers and staff alike. It has been quite a learning experience. As a result, I will have many positive memories of my time in this program. However, it is time to move on and enjoy whatever new adventures lie in store for me. It has been an interesting ride, one I will never regret making.



Inside This Issue

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Reggio Emilia: More than Meets the Eye

Patricia F. Hearron

Reggio Emilia is a small city in northern Italy where a complex, highly integrated system of early childhood education and care has evolved since World War II and recently gained worldwide renown. *Newsweek Magazine* called Reggio's Diana School "the best preschool in the world." Prominent early childhood educators in the United States echo that opinion, professing that, before visiting Reggio Emilia, they had not imagined what really high quality programs could look like. When educators speak of the *Reggio Emilia Approach,* they are referring to this total system, not to a curriculum model or method. You can't be trained and certified as a "Reggio" teacher or program. You can't "do" Reggio, but you can be inspired by this place where adults have a deep conviction about the potential of children and profound respect for each one of them.

If you were to visit Reggio, the sheer beauty of their preschools and infant-toddler centers would probably strike you first. You would notice environments filled with light, with invitations everywhere to explore and see things from different angles. Strategically placed windows offer glimpses into other classrooms, into the kitchen, into an indoor courtyard bringing nature into the school, or into an outdoor play area where children have constructed an amusement park for birds. Light tables and shadow screens invite deep explorations of color and shape. Slides projected in dramatic enlargements on walls let children revisit field trips and literally immerse themselves in memories. Mirrors behind shelves or lining a play structure let children see the other side of intriguing objects or ponder their own mysteriously multiplied reflections.

Toddlers nap in cozy wicker "nests" under lights filtered through swaths of pale yellow gauze draped across the ceiling. But Reggio is more than a pretty place.

Moving through those environments, you would notice elaborate constructions and delightful drawings, paintings, or sculptures on display. You might even wonder whether they could really be the creations of preschool children. You would be witnessing examples of what Reggio educators call the 100 languages of children—the multiple ways of experiencing and understanding the world as well as communicating that understanding. All these languages come into play as small groups of children work on projects such as designing and constructing a water wheel for their amusement park for birds. But Reggio is more than impressive project work.

Undoubtedly you would be engrossed— perhaps even overwhelmed—by the compelling documentation panels, which tell the stories behind these projects in words and pictures. As you studied this documentation, however, you would soon realize that there is more to the Reggio Emilia Approach than meets the eye. The beautiful environments create innumerable possibilities for children's relationships with each other, with adults and with materials, relationships that are the heart of the entire educational process. They welcome families and embody the concepts that parents, teachers and children are all protagonists (key players); that school is life, not just preparation for life, and therefore deserves the kind of thoughtful spaces our culture usually reserves for "important" adult pursuits.

The awe-inspiring projects are said to be the "extraordinary work of ordinary children." They evolve as teachers co-construct knowledge with children and with colleagues, projecting or hypothesizing many possibilities for continuing work on a particular topic, instead of setting out fixed plans for activities and products. The documentation panels are stunning, but it is the process of documentation that is crucial to creating a curriculum that is respectful of children. The process of documentation is also respectful of teachers because it involves them as researchers rather than mere trained technicians who deliver curriculum modules. At the root of all these elements lies an image of the child as strong, powerful, and full of potential. Children have rights instead of needs, and children with "special needs" are viewed as having special rights. Everything is held to-

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gether by an intricate organizational web in which every aspect— environment, curriculum, administrative policies, human relationships—depends on, and impacts, every other aspect.

Certainly, this brief description can hardly do justice to an approach that has been studied in depth by thousands of educators around the world, but perhaps it can whet your appetite to learn more from the many books, articles, and videos available. Alongside this kind of study, you can take the first steps of your own journey of discovery by observing more closely and documenting your own experiences with children. Watch your children as they play, and record your observations. Take photographs or videotape. Listen to, and tape-record, their conversations. Find a **quiet** time to go back and review the data you have collected, looking for the big ideas that captivate children and generate energy. Ask a colleague to help you see what you might be missing. Remember that you are learning from—as well as with—the children and be alert for the many signs of their great potential.

Let the children know you are doing this and ask them to tell you more about their ideas. Look for ways that you can help them explore these big ideas more deeply and continue recording what happens as you do. When you feel ready, try to pull together some of their conversations and your photographs with your own written explanation of what happened and why you think it was important—a "big idea." Share this with parents, your colleagues, the children themselves. Repeat this process again and again, as you gradually move toward becoming (and seeing yourself as) a teacher-researcher. Inevitably, your own image of the child as strong, powerful, and full of potential will begin to emerge.

Be warned, however, that you'll probably also become hungry to learn more! My own fascination with Reggio, sparked by an article that Lella Gandini wrote in 1984, continues to grow. The more I listen, observe, read and reflect, the more I feel as though I am peeling an onion, exposing layer after layer of thought provoking ideas. Along with many thousands of teachers around the world, you too will find the sense of joy that comes from this kind of learning both exciting and rejuvenating. Buon viaggio! ❖

The author, a former licensing consultant in Michigan, is a professor of child development at Appalachian State University in Boone, NC, where she directs a laboratory preschool and infant-toddler program.

Capable Children Create Their Own Environment

Shelia Oatley, Education Coordinator
University of Michigan Child Development Center
Wayne County

The Child Development Center at the University of Michigan-Dearborn utilizes an adaptation of the principles of the Reggio Emilia arts based project approach to education. This philosophy emphasizes the use of creative arts to help children express themselves. Having the children involved in the process of setting up a new environment is intrinsic to this philosophy. Four years ago the Center received a small grant from a philanthropic foundation to purchase materials and furniture to create an art room to support this approach.

When teachers make changes in the classroom environment, are children included in the decision making process? Usually other teachers might be consulted but in most situations probably not the children.

According to the teacher, Jennifer Bauer, she began by talking with the children about creating a special area in the classroom where they could work on projects. It was decided to turn the storage room in the back of the classroom into an art room. The teacher planned many activities involving the children in the process. Equipment catalogs were brought to group time to help give the children ideas. They had many group discussions on what would be needed to turn the storage room into an art room. Staff, through questioning, helped the children think about size and use of materials. The children made a list of the supplies needed and they were ordered.

Anticipation grew among the children and staff as boxes began to arrive. Mrs. Bauer wanted the children to be involved in all aspects of the process. She read instructions for the children as they assembled the equipment using real tools. Now they were ready to plan the arrangement of the room.

The children worked independently and in small groups to plan the placement of furniture. Each plan was considered and tried by the staff moving the furniture according to the children's plan. The children discussed its effectiveness. Did it work? Why or why not? After several days of implementing various designs the children decided one child's plan was best suited to the needs of everyone. It included a layout in which the tables were near each other so the children

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The Magic of Montessori

Sue Bruno, Linda Gilson,
Mary Lepczyk, and Heather Young, Directors, S.T.E.P.S. Montessori School, Saginaw, MI

About Maria Montessori

Maria Montessori, born in Italy in 1870, became the first woman to earn a degree in medicine from the University of Rome. Early in her career the young doctor oversaw an institution for developmentally delayed children. She developed a method to instruct these children, and was so successful that they began to achieve at levels similar to children in the regular Italian school system. This experience led her to use her philosophy and methods with children of normal intelligence.

In 1906, she opened the first in a series of "Children's Houses" in a slum district in Rome. In a room originally intended to be a custodial care center for the children of working parents, Montessori quickly began to implement academic and daily life lessons into the curriculum. She closely observed children to refine and develop her method. As she watched and assessed the behaviors of her charges, she modified the content of her classroom and her instructional methods to better fit the needs of children. Many of these instructional techniques are still being used in Montessori schools today.

The Montessori Philosophy

Montessori was a step ahead of her time in understanding the implications of early brain development. In one of her key writings, The Absorbant Mind, she stated that "The most important period of life is not the age of university studies, but the first one, the period of birth to the age of six. For that is the time when man's intelligence itself, his greatest implement is being formed". The child's mind at this unique stage of development is like a sponge, absorbing information and impressions from the environment. Montessori felt that the goal of early childhood education should be one of discovery, where children experience the joy of learning through their own choices and through hands-on discovery.

Activities in a Montessori classroom invite the child to learn within their own areas of interest and readiness in a mixed age setting. The classroom is a children's world where everything is geared to their size and is carefully prepared and maintained. Hands-on involvement with the equipment helps the child perfect his coordination, lengthen his attention span, help focus attention to detail and instill good work habits as he finishes each task and puts away all materials before beginning another activity.

A Montessori classroom is always a busy place. The use of materials involves lots of movement; walking, carrying, pouring, balancing, speaking and especially the use of the hands. This high level of activity happens within the framework of *respect*. Respect is interactive between children, teachers and the environment. Children are always spoken to in quiet tones, in a positive manner and at their eye level. They are expected to return this respect to teachers and to other classmates.

A common misconception is that children are allowed to run wild. Not so. Montessori believed in "freedom within limits." The child is given the freedom to explore the classroom, work with materials, and to learn and be creative within the basic ground rules of the classroom.

The Montessori Classroom

Upon entering a Montessori classroom, one notices that everything available to the children, is scaled down to their size, as it is easier for children to manipulate their environment if it is of appropriate size for their small hands. Materials are colorful, attractive and well maintained. Montessori felt strongly that items given to children should be as attractive

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and well made as items used by adults. If a material is not of interest to the child, no matter how good the concept behind it, the child will not use it to the fullest extent possible, and will not gain anything by its mere presence in the classroom.

The phrase "prepared environment" is an often used term when referring to a Montessori classroom. Montessori believed that the materials and classroom should be prepared prior to the arrival of he children. Each activity should be complete with all its' needed components before being offered to the children for use. This enables a child to choose an activity and to complete that activity independently. Children with special needs flourish in this setting as Montessori education is designed to be very individualized.

When a classroom is arranged appropriately, children seek out materials that are of interest to them. The adult in the classroom is ready and willing to assist the children in their chosen activities. When a child has trouble choosing an activity, a Montessori director suggests that the child look at a particular shelf and choose from the materials contained therein. While the teacher has narrowed the field of choices, the ultimate choice is left to the child. This insures the child has an investment in the chosen material, gains benefit from manipulating it, and is not doing the work just to please the teacher.

Montessori classrooms provide a wide variety of materials for children to explore. While academic materials are available, a Montessori classroom should also provide for art, sensory, motor, music, movement, and fantasy play experiences. A properly prepared Montessori environment reaches out to the whole child, and provides a well rounded school experience for all students. ❖

Montessori: An Atmosphere of Freedom

Mary Pat Jennings, Licensing Consultant
Isabella County

Montessori children are offered a wealth of activities and materials in an atmosphere of freedom. Visitors often wonder how very young children in a classroom containing literally hundreds of pieces of accessible equipment, are able to work in such an orderly manner, in an open environment with minimal adult direction. One answer is the thoughtful preparation, planning, presentation and use of learning materials and activities.

Most early childhood professionals consider the learning material, its purpose, the ages of the children and procedures to be used when doing an activity. Montessori teachers address several additional matters:

- The purpose of the material is seen in terms of **direct** and **indirect aims**. For instance, the direct aim of the familiar cylinder blocks is to refine visual discrimination. Indirect aims include, but are not limited to the development of fine motor skills, including the grasp of the fingers for writing; the enrichment of language skills, including vocabulary related to the material; and the development of math skills including seriation and one-to-one correspondence.
- Teachers also look for a **point of interest**, or an aspect of the material that makes it attractive to children. The cylinder blocks are pleasing to the touch and children *like* to put objects into holes.
- Materials need to have a **control of error**, so that children can work independently. Teachers prepare for introducing an activity to children by practicing with the materials ahead of time and developing a logical and clear sequence of demonstration.
- This **presentation** always begins at the shelf where the material is stored, so that children know how to pick up, carry, use and replace the material independently.
- After the initial presentation, teachers may suggest, or encourage children to devise **variations** for the use of the material in order to extend learning and perfect skills.
- Finally, once a child begins to work with a material, he is given the **time** he needs to complete and repeat the activity in a way that is satisfying to him, even when it means that he might spend an entire class engaged in one activity. ❖

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Ten Good Reasons to Use Themes

Toni Goud, Co-Owner/Director
Fun Factory Preschool, Wayne County

If you're not using thematic units in your preschool here are 10 good reasons to use them. Once you experience the benefits, you'll never want to use anything else.

1. Themes Promote Concept Development

We know that the concepts children form about objects are the building blocks of knowledge. Children form these concepts through firsthand experiences. Children are looking for connections in their relationship to the world and the use of thematic units can be one way of helping children make these connections. Pieces of information tie together more easily when a theme is used as a framework. A unit on weather is broad enough for a one or two week theme. The elements of wind and rain would be small enough sub-themes for a one, two or three day theme. Make sure that your theme is carried out in as many of your learning centers as possible in order to provide the most opportunities for these connections to be made.

2. Using Themes Allow Children to Easily Build on Prior Knowledge

Learning often is built in layers. We learn new information to add to what we already know. Themes provide continued opportunities for this layering of information. From preschool through elementary school, a child may enjoy a unit on dinosaurs. Each year new information is added that is developmentally appropriate and the child adds the new to the prior base of knowledge. Each program (3's, 4's and Young 5's) does a dinosaur thematic unit. Children don't tire of themes that are appealing to them.

3. Themes Make it Easy to Address More Learning Styles

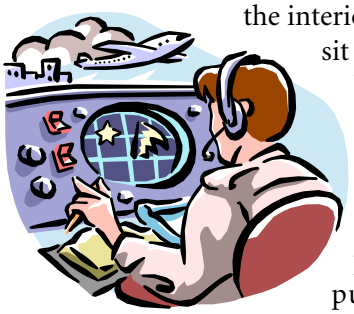
Many of the learning centers in your room (block, dramatic play, reading, etc.,) represent different learning styles. Make sure these areas contain thematic material to address many of the learning styles of individual students. One child may enjoy the information a teacher and students share at circle time, another child may prefer to interact with the theme in a more active way at dramatic play. During a week-long unit on wild animals, we include a dramatic play area complete with a child-size pop-up tent and safari explorer equipment. The animals are never hunted, only photographed! Children even make cardboard tube binoculars and Kleenex box cameras for project choices.

4. Themes Help to Integrate Content and Process Learning

Because themes are often rich with content material and dramatic play opportunities, there is more opportunity for process learning to occur. Process learning happens when children expand social, emotional, cognitive, and physical skills while interacting with content material. For instance a theme on "Ants" might include role play about the different roles of ants in the colony. As children discuss the different roles of ants and assign jobs to play act, they are demonstrating cooperation and compromise, idea sharing and other process orientated skills.

5. Themes Give Children a Sense of Direction

Select themes that make sense to children. If children can't relate to the theme you've chosen, don't use it. Use the world that surrounds your preschoolers as a source for some of your units. Choose some themes that are unique to the general lifestyle of the children you care for. Our 4's teachers chose one air travel theme based on interest from children about planes. During this transportation unit, children arrive at school and are handed a boarding pass and enter the classroom through a makeshift tunnel to find the carpet side of the classroom transformed into the interior of an airplane. They sit in rows, are cared for by flight attendants (the teachers) and are even given an onboard snack! Our puppet stage doubles as a cockpit and an old computer keyboard as our flight instrumentation. During center time some rows of seats are removed and the children enjoy using a safety ladder and binoculars as the control tower. A sense of direction is created in relating to the surrounding world when children can manipulate their environment during these hands-on learning activities.



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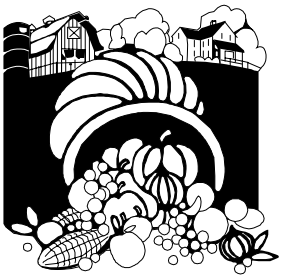
6. Themes are Versatile and Adaptive to Any Program

A theme can encompass a month, week, or day. We like to use week long themes with sub-themes being one day in length. Sometimes we have a general month long theme like *Foods* in November. One week contains the sub-theme of *Foods Around the World* with Tacos, Rice and Pasta. Each of these days we include cultural information, cooking and tasting opportunities, music and art experiences unique to each culture. Since the same room is used for our 3's two-day- a-week program and our 4's three-day-a-week program, we like to align themes so props and decorations don't have to be taken down each day. For instance, when we have our Wild Animal Week the 3's do Elephants and Tigers/ Lions and the 4's do Safari, Circus and Zoo. The props and decorations are similar but the content material and projects differ. I also like to list the themes for all programs on one calendar so parents can readily see the progress of units from one program to another.



7. Thematic Units Prevent Boredom with Curriculum

Children and adults alike will not become bored when each new week and/or new day contains a new theme! Each day is another beginning. If a particular unit is unappealing to a child, he or she can soon look forward on the calendar to another theme in the near future. Who doesn't enjoy something new!

8. Teachers Love Using Themes!

It's fun to dress for a special unit or to bring a special prop from home. Maybe a certain teacher has a special talent related to one of your themes. Or maybe they just like the theme itself. At our school, a different teacher takes the lead position for the month. Often assignments are made based on what themes we favor the most.

9. Themes Provide Opportunities for Parents to be Involved

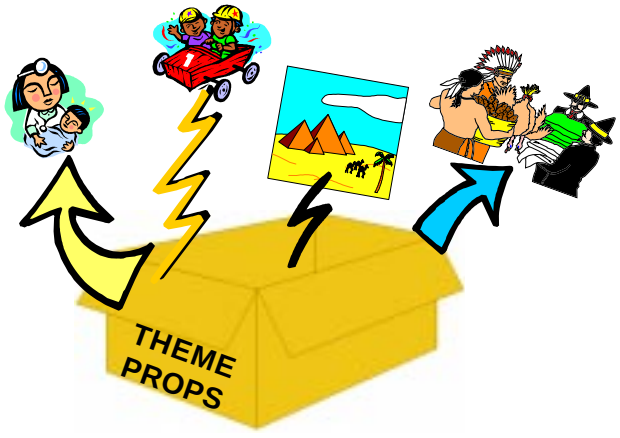
The connection between home and school is an important one and themes provide some real ways that parents can feel included. Parents can provide props needed or perhaps a parent has some expertise in your theme area that they could share at circle time. Parents can be a real wealth of resource for your thematic units, especially if you are just getting started. Just the other day, a parent brought in some transportation wallpaper samples knowing that we do a transportation unit. Advertise for some of the props you could use for a particular thematic unit. Everyone will benefit.

10. The Best Reason to Use Themes is that Children Love Them!

If for no other reason, try using themes because your children will love them. Sometimes children show up in clothing related to the theme or bring in a related item from home. It's fun to see their excitement and interest. Themes will help maintain a high interest level and will help motivate children to explore the classroom with an eagerness to experience and learn!

Tips on Organizing Your Themes

Plastic storage boxes that are clearly labeled make it easy to store our theme materials. Fingerplays, books, project samples and props are stored in these boxes. The boxes are labeled according to the theme inside. We organize our themes on shelving units and arrange them in the order in which we use them. Another way to organize would be to use boxes labeled for the month with the needed theme supplies inside. Some unit boxes are small and others large depending on the props needed, materials, and length of thematic unit. ❖



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Prop Boxes - Full of Fun and Learning

Marianne Struckmeyer, M.A.
Delton Cooperative Preschool Teacher
Barry County

Would you like to see your child grow physically, socially, emotionally and cognitively all in one learning experience? Get out your prop boxes and get ready for hours of interaction and fun. As a child enters the make-believe world of the prop box, adult roles are mimicked. This role-playing involves the whole child and, therefore, the whole child grows.

Physical growth comes through the actions that go with the props you provide. A firefighter climbs on top of tall buildings, carries long hoses, sometimes has to chop down a doorway, and always crawls along the floor on entering a smoky building. A mechanic crawls under cars, lifts heavy equipment and probably will have to build the backhoe, bobcat or car itself, before he can fix it.

Social growth occurs when children interact with others in dramatic play. Now they can be barbers, grocers, doctors or florists. Tied with social growth is emotional growth. What children say and how they react to other children will either encourage them to keep playing or make them want to quit. They will learn how to get along with others through direct interactions. The best teacher is actual experiences.

Cognitive growth happens through the choices, decisions and problem solving the child does as he engages in play. New names for all kinds of equipment adds to the child's vocabulary. Labeling objects, role playing, name tags and adding at least one book that goes along with the props all add to the experience. The language skills, creativity and imagination that occurs is rich and only limited by the number of children that play.

Prop boxes can be inspired by a particular theme you are working on, but the best source is the children themselves. Adult interaction can help the child build what goes into the prop box. Questions such as, "What does a person who does that wear?"; "What kind of tools do you need when you do that?"; and "Where would you find people who use these tools?" all add to the cognitive development of the child and the contents of the boxes. Label the boxes with both print and pictures. Put them within the children's reach. Let them be in on the decision as to what they are going to play today. You might need to limit the number of boxes that are in use at one time, depending on your setting.

Excellent sources for the contents of your prop boxes are your parents and the businesses in the community. If a parent is a dental hygienist, have her visit the class, explain what kind of work she does and the tools she uses, and bring extra materials to go into the box. If a dad is a mechanic, have him wear his overalls, bring in his tools, and explain to the children how he fixes things. Actual materials add a special reality to the play, but of course safety is always the first concern. Substitute pretend things where necessary. Garage sales can give you a wealth of materials for very little money. Plan a field trip to a post office or regular office, telling the children they will be making a prop box after the visit. Have them look for things they think they will need to do the job.

Your role, whether it is as a teacher or parent, should be to provide the materials, model what the worker might say or do, and offer extensions to enrich the child's experience. As soon as interest in a box lags, let the child choose a different box for the next day. Often one box can lead to another. The mechanic can say the car cannot be fixed, you will need to buy a new one. That will lead to the used car lot and a salesman, or possibly to the bank to get some money.

Finally, remember, play is the child's work. It is through play that the child grows and learns. Prop boxes allow the child to incorporate physical activity, cooperative play, dramatic play, math, language, classification, and pre-literacy skills all into a box. But one word of wisdom! When searching for boxes to use for props, remember you can never find a box big enough to hold a child's creativity. ❖

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News From FIA

Overview of Better Kid Care Project-Phase II

As a result of welfare reform, the number of low-income parents required to participate in education and/or training programs or to seek employment, has increased dramatically. These parents are seeking child care.

The Better Kid Care Project is a statewide program that has coupled Michigan State University Extension and the Family Independence Agency of Michigan. This project works to further involve both agencies in the area of child care. Better Kid Care - Phase I was designed to enhance the skills of child care providers throughout Michigan. This objective was achieved through the broadcast of the Better Kid Care satellite series, produced by Penn State University Extension. The series was supplemented with additional child care resources, as well as discussions facilitated by Michigan State Univesity Extension staff members.

The topics of the satellite series for the 2000-2001 year are:

- Hot Topics for Center Directors (11/28/00)
- Biting and Sharing (12/07/00)
- Pets in Child Care (3/01/01)
- New Ways to Plan Activities (4/05/01)
- Let's Celebrate (5/03/01)
- Exciting Backyard Science Activities (6/07/01)

The goal of Phase II of the **Better Kid Care Project** is to assist low-income parents, significant others, extended family and friends in low income neighborhoods to take an active role in responding to child care issues resulting from welfare reform.

There is a need to find ways to reach out to the diverse group of relative care, child care providers and to recruit other community members to become regulated child care providers. One way to reach this audience is to offer training in a supportive and convenient environment, using paraprofessionals who not only train, but also mentor the providers.

Three major strategies will be used to accomplish the goal.

1. Engage the community by providing outreach into the community.
2. Provide training opportunities specific to the needs of the community. The comprehensive small group training will occur in locations convenient to participants and will introduce new providers to community resources.
3. Mentoring and support will occur by connecting experienced providers with new providers; by assisting applicants with the regulatory process; and by facilitating the development of provider support groups.

For more information, email the project coordinators, Ruth Miller, millerru@msue.msu.edu or Barbara Mutch, mutchb@msue.msu.edu

This publication provides topical information regarding young children who are cared for in licensed child care settings. We encourage child care providers to make this publication available to parents of children in care, or to provide them with the web address so they may receive their own copy. Issue 43 and beyond are available on the internet. **This document is in the public domain and we encourage reprinting.**

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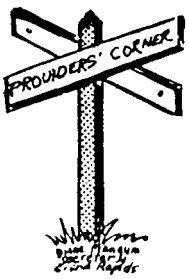

Thank you, Julie

Roxanne Rowley,
Early Childhood Specialist
Four Stars Preschool

Working with preschool children is many things. Some days are challenging and exhausting, while other days are exhilarating and insightful. No two days are ever the same. And no two children are ever alike. Each child leaves their mark on you, some more indelible than others.

Several years ago I had a little girl, "Julie" (name has been changed to respect privacy) in my classroom that was in foster care because she had been severely abused by her parents. Her foster parents were wonderful people, kind and patient. They hoped being with other children her age would help bring her out of the shell that she had built around herself. Her counselor encouraged us (my assistant and me) to be patient and accepting hoping that Julie would eventually begin to feel comfortable in her new school surroundings.

Julie's demeanor at the beginning of the year was flat and expressionless. I found her huge brown eyes haunting me even in my dreams. Julie was not too talkative or at all aggressive, despite what she had been through. She was passive and very quiet. Julie always wore dresses with long sleeves and one day while we were washing up for snack I noticed that when she pulled up her sleeves, there were the unmistakable round scars resulting from cigarette burns. I tried not to stare, but my heart wept for this little girl who was so small and lovely.

I have always respected children's reactions to new settings. With Julie it was no different. I talked to her and read to her, always making sure that she approached me first. I wanted her to know that I cared for her, but I did not want to overwhelm her. Little by little, her reserve came down and about halfway through the year Julie smiled during a story. My heart raced as I finished the story through a blur of tears. Once the reserve was cracked, that shell she had around herself came crumbling down.

By years' end Julie was a happy, smiling four year old. The reserve was gone. The once haunted brown eyes sparkled. And Julie became the curious, bright child that had always been there, hidden away by the torment of child abuse.

Julie's story had an even happier ending because by the end of the school year, her foster parents had become her adoptive parents. The last day of school was more emotional than most for me as I bid Julie farewell. I am not sure she remembers me, but I still remember her smile and those huge brown eyes. She left an indelible mark on my heart.

Julie made me a better teacher. I found out that I had more compassion and patience than I realized. She helped me reaffirm that caring and kindness can come full circle. She taught me that the power of love can heal. And she helped me realize that as a teacher I could touch hearts and souls, as well as minds. Thank you, Julie. ❖

Capable Children, *continued from Page 3*

could work together, and still have enough room for the staff to move around and assist the children. The new furniture was then moved into the room according to the plan.

The art room was completed and a room dedication ceremony was planned by the children. The art room was dedicated to Dr. Rosalyn Saltz, the founder and former director of the Child Development Center who introduced the Reggio Emila inspired approach to the Center.

The whole process took three months. This may seem like a great deal of time. While it takes time to involve the children it is time well spent. This approach permits children to have the time to discover, practice, explore, and experiment. During the whole process the teacher documented the project using photos, typing up children's discussions and displaying them on boards for the parents and children to follow the process. This documentation served as a learning tool and a memory of the project for the children, their parents, the staff, and the teacher.

From the project, according to Mrs. Bauer, the children experienced:

- Planning, predicting, and decision making
- Working in cooperation with others
- Feeling pride and ownership of the room they created.
- Having their ideas valued by children and adults

The teacher said she experienced patience, cooperation, and shared ownership of learning. This project renewed her sense that children are competent and capable individuals when given the chance to show it.

Even without utilizing the Reggio Emilia approach, allowing children to create their own environment is a powerful learning tool. There is much to be gained. ❖

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Resources:
Exceptional Practice: Theory and Program

Cadwell, L.B. (1997). Bringing Reggio Emilia Back Home: An Innovative Approach to Early Childhood Education. New York: Teachers College Press.

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Hohmann, Mary & Weikart, David P. Educating Young Children: Active Learning Practices for Preschool and Child Care Programs. St. Paul, MN: Redleaf Press. (www.redleafpress.org).

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Kritchevsky, S. & E. Prescott. Planning Environments for Young Children: Physical Space. Washington DC: National Association for the Development of Young Children. Phone: 1-800-424-2460. (www.naeyc.org).

Mooney, Carol Garhart. Theories of Childhood: An Introduction to Dewey, Montessori, Erikson, Piaget, and Vygotsky. St. Paul, MN: Redleaf Press. (www.redleafpress.org) .

Upcoming Conferences

Michigan Collaborative Early Childhood Conference.
January 25-26, 2001
Hyatt Hotel, Dearborn, MI

MAEYC Conference
March 29-31, 2001
Amway Grand Hotel, Grand Rapids, MI

Ends of the Rainbow Series
Preventing Communicable Disease in Child Care
April 28, 2001
Sites to be announced

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Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS)

October was **Sudden Infant Death Syndrome Awareness Month**. The Department of Consumer & Industry Services sent flyers and brochures regarding this topic to all licensed and registered child care facilities. For those of you who have recently joined Michigan's child caring community, the following information is essential for you, your staff, and parents. Are you aware:

· That Sudden Infant Death Syndrome or crib death is the leading cause of death among healthy infants?

· That SIDS deaths are more likely to occur when infants are in the care of someone other than their parents?

Recommendations for your care of infants:

1. Healthy babies should sleep on their back.
2. Babies should sleep on a firm, flat mattress with a tightly fitted sheet.
3. Babies should not get too hot.
4. Babies should not be exposed to cigarette smoke.
5. Make sure your CPR and First Aid skills are current.
6. Check sleeping infants often.
7. Parents should be called immediately if babies seem ill.

Communicate with the parents of infants:

· Develop policies which address the recommended infant sleep position.

· Discuss and share these policies on sleep position with the parents.

· Help them to understand the steps you will take to reduce the risk of SIDS while their child is in care.

· Share the "Back to Sleep" brochure with the parents.

For more SIDS information, connect to the SIDS Alliance website (www.sidsalliance.org), or call the Michigan SIDS Alliance at 1-800-331-SIDS.

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